



# Taking Reflection into the Real World of Teaching

by Joan Pedro

By engaging in reflective practice, beginning teachers can become active partners with administrators and experienced teachers in the school community.

---

*Joan Pedro is an Assistant Professor and Coordinator of Teacher Education at the University of Hartford. Her primary interest is teacher development in the areas of reflective practice, assessment, and literacy practices. She serves as Counselor to the Pi Phi Chapter of Kappa Delta Pi.*

A new type of teacher is needed in the contemporary classroom—one who is not just a mere technician, but who can keep an open and critical mind. Today's teacher must adjust to a fast-changing reality and the demands of the surrounding world, and internalize the ever-growing flow of information while reflecting on both personal and professional levels (Beed et al. 2005). Research over the last two decades has suggested that reflection is at the heart of effective educational practice (Sweeney 1998; Black 2002) in that it considers the cognitive, social, and moral implications of teaching (Valli 1993; Zeichner and Liston 1987).

In the teacher-education community, many advocate the reflective practice framework and have adopted this paradigm in preparing teachers. The proponents of reflective practice see it as the vehicle for getting the new cadre of teachers involved as active partners in school renewal (Valli 1992; Zeichner and Liston 1987). Administrators and experienced teachers must take ownership for mentoring beginning teachers to prepare them for the complexities of everyday teaching and decision making. The valuable concept of reflection must not continue to be manifested as a form of wishful thinking, but should be used as a practical tool for educational planning and professional growth (White 2002).

Educators recognize that there is no one best way to realize the power of reflection. Through their questions, thoughts, and feelings, beginning teachers can critically consider actions they may take for granted and the extent to which their teaching practices foster equitable conditions for learning (Beed et al. 2005). This article examines the ways that administrators and experienced teachers can encourage beginning teachers to engage in reflective practice in the real world of teaching, where teacher accountability and mastery testing are the order of the day and little time is given over to reflection.

### What Is Reflective Practice?

Dewey (1933) introduced the concept of reflection. He considered it to be an active and deliberative cognitive process which involves sequences of interconnected ideas that take into account underlying beliefs and knowledge (Hatton and Smith 1995). Dewey's (1916) premise was that teachers should be encouraged to become thoughtful and alert students of education, and should continue to grow through reflection. He advocated the cultivation of three attitudes: open-mindedness (a willingness to consider multiple or novel ideas), whole-heartedness, and responsibility. Schön (1983; 1996) expanded Dewey's notion of reflection, suggesting that professionals frame and reframe the

complex problems they face and modify their actions accordingly.

The value of practicing reflection has been reiterated by many researchers. Shulman (1987) and Richardson (1990) contended that reflective models are in keeping with the holistic way in which teachers actually think and act in the classroom. Exploring the nature of reflective practice, Calderhead (1993) and others found that reflective teaching contributes to

"By becoming independent and reflective thinkers, beginning teachers are able to cooperate, contribute, and grow professionally."

professional development by encouraging teachers to analyze, discuss, and evaluate practice. Teachers, through reflection, can become aware of their intuitive knowledge and engage in problem solving that helps to strengthen their teaching ability (Vacca, Vacca, and Bruneau 1997). Valli (1993) supported the view that teachers could be both technically prepared for and reflective about making practical decisions. She further stated that teachers can exercise professional judgment to adapt and modify their skills in response to students' needs and curriculum goals.

Reflection is enhanced when teachers practice it within a supportive community. Schön (1996) suggested that reflective practice involves thoughtfully considering one's own experiences in applying knowledge to practice while being coached by professionals in the discipline. Collaborative reflection can positively affect professional growth and development by leading participants to a greater sense of self-awareness. By becoming independent and reflective thinkers, beginning teachers are able to cooperate, contribute, and grow professionally. In addition, reflection can lead to professional forms of inquiry and goal setting (Boreen et al. 2000).

One contention in the literature is that the educational system has failed to nurture a culture of genuine reflection within the school community (White

2002). Administrators and experienced teachers have the responsibility to help beginning teachers continue to practice reflection as they embark on their journey to become full-fledged professionals in the field.

### Opportunities for Reflection

For reflection to take place, schools should provide opportunities where beginning teachers can share in the problem-solving process. Time needs to be claimed for meetings where reflective practice is allowed to occur (White 2002). From the start of their careers, beginning teachers should be encouraged to engage in verbal reflections regarding school matters. Reflection should not be simply another add-on to place on the shoulders of teachers who already feel burdened by the many teaching tasks; it needs to have its place within the planning cycle (White 2002).

Some opportunities for reflection include the following:

- **Staff meetings.** Beginning teachers are not often heard at staff meetings because they are “new” to the school. These beginning teachers come with many new ideas they have learned in their teacher-education programs and can share different perspectives.
- **Teaming.** Teams of peers can evaluate programs and suggest new and different ways of engaging in tasks.
- **Planning meetings.** The principal and other experienced teachers must make a concerted effort to involve beginning teachers in the planning process. Beginning teachers can accept ownership of new tasks to be accomplished.

### Support from Mentors

In their first year of practice, new teachers need the support of professionals in their new school environment. Mentoring can mitigate teacher isolation and promote an educative workplace (Carter and Francis 2000). The school administration should actively promote collaboration among beginning teachers and mentors. Collaboration is facilitated when teachers take time to engage in reflective dialogues (Boreen et al. 2000).

The role of the mentor during reflective dialogue is not only to provide answers, but to help the beginning teacher develop his or her own answers to questions. A mentor can use many strategies to help a beginning teacher organize his or her thoughts and make sense of classroom events. Mentors can engage in rewarding activities such as:



## Everything You'll Need . . . to Make Your First Year a Success!

Make an easy transition  
from student to teacher  
with this simple and  
practical guide, based on  
the collective experience  
of three veteran educators.

Member price **\$12.95**

Nonmember price **\$14.95**

To order, go to [www.kdp.org](http://www.kdp.org)

or call Kappa Delta Pi

**800.284.3167**

KDP order number 534

RESP06RST



- asking questions to encourage reflection on lessons and other activities;
- acting as a guide for the first year of teaching, and having the beginning teacher trace the steps in his or her teaching activities;
- sharing different sources of support with beginning teachers and encouraging them to reflect on how they can best use those resources to enhance their teaching;
- providing verbal and written feedback to support beginning teachers as they reflect on the day-to-day classroom dilemmas they face in the first year;
- building an amicable relationship through reflective conversations that set the tone for a good teaching experience;
- giving honest feedback and offering different perspectives to help beginning teachers reflect and build on their practice; and
- probing into a variety of areas to help the beginning teacher go beyond the technical level of reflection to the contextual and critical levels.

## The Use of Questioning

Questioning and problem solving are two ways that individuals can be reflective about their actions in the classroom. As a means of learning what is expected of them within the classroom context and in their teaching, beginning teachers can question themselves as they reflect on different classroom dilemmas. Zeichner and Liston (1987) contended that unearthing what is best for the children served requires questioning at the deepest level. The literature on reflective practice encourages teachers to question how and why they are doing what they are doing (Cruikshank 1981). By questioning their actions, beginning teachers can become reflective professionals who examine their own beliefs and are open-minded in their problem solving and decision making.

## Written Reflections

Writing is an excellent tool for developing critical reflection. Beginning teachers should be encouraged to engage in written reflection to further their own professional development. The writing can take the form of a journal or daily note-taking that teachers can refer to in the future and use as a valuable resource for solving the problems they encounter. Reflective narratives help teachers gain skills both for doing and for analyzing what they do (Colton and Sparks-Langer 1993; Zeichner and Liston 1987).

## Final Thoughts

Reflection on teaching often starts in the university

classroom and ends in the school. With encouragement, beginning teachers can incorporate what they have learned in their teacher-preparation programs into the real-world experiences of their classroom. Educators must be mindful that reflection on teaching is a process; to become a truly reflective teacher involves time, experience and, inevitably, effort (Brubacher, Case, and Reagan 1994).

Beginning teachers can continue to reflect on their own and in collaboration with others. Given time and opportunities, they can share their reflections about experiences they have particularly enjoyed in their classes, as well as those about occurrences that were not so joyful. A beginning teacher can share verbal reflections with a mentor whose experience and support can help during that first year. By engaging in reflective practice, beginning teachers can reflect not only on technical aspects, but also on the social and moral issues of teaching. ■

## References

- Beed, P. L., V. G. Ridgeway, F. Brownlie, and S. Kalnina. 2005. The power of reflective writing for students and teachers. In *Reading, writing, thinking: Proceedings of the 13th European conference on reading*, ed. M. Pandis, A. Ward, and S. R. Mathews, 163–67. Newark, DE: International Reading Association. Available at: [www.reading.org/downloads/publications/books/bk594-23-Beed.pdf](http://www.reading.org/downloads/publications/books/bk594-23-Beed.pdf).
- Black, S. 2002. Thinking about teaching: How teachers can put reflection at the heart of their teaching. *Inform* 5(2): 14–17.
- Boreen, J., M. K. Johnson, D. Niday, and J. Potts. 2000. *Mentoring beginning teachers: Guiding, reflecting, coaching*. York, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.
- Brubacher, J. W., C. W. Case, and T. G. Reagan. 1994. *Becoming a reflective educator: How to build a culture of inquiry in the schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Calderhead, J. 1993. Dilemmas in developing reflective teaching. *Teacher Education Quarterly* 20(1): 93–100.
- Carter, M., and R. Francis. 2000. Mentoring and beginning teachers' workplace learning. Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education Conference, December 4–7, Sydney, Australia. Available at: [www.aare.edu.au/00pap/car00232.htm](http://www.aare.edu.au/00pap/car00232.htm).
- Colton, A. B., and G. M. Sparks-Langer. 1993. A conceptual framework to guide the development of teacher reflection and decision making. *Journal of Teacher Education* 44(1): 45–54.
- Cruikshank, D. R. 1981. *Reflective teaching*. Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa.
- Dewey, J. 1916. *Democracy and education*. New York: Macmillan.
- Dewey, J. 1933. *How we think: A restatement of the relation of reflective thinking to the educative process*. Boston: D. C. Heath.
- Hatton, N., and D. Smith. 1995. Reflection in teacher education: Towards definition and implementation. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 11(1): 33–49. Available at: <http://alex.edfac.usyd.edu.au/LocalResource/Study1/hattonart.html>.
- Richardson, V. 1990. The evolution of reflective teaching and teacher education. In *Encouraging reflective practice in education: An analysis of issues and programs*, ed. R. T. Cliff, W. R. Houston, and M. C. Pugach, 3–19. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Schön, D. A. 1983. *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. New York: Basic Books.
- Schön, D. A. 1996. *Educating the reflective practitioner: Toward a new design for teaching and learning in the professions*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Shulman, L. 1987. Knowledge of teaching: Foundations of the new reform. *Harvard Educational Review* 57(1): 1–22.
- Sweeney, C. 1998. Opening Pandora's box through critical reflection: Changing my pedagogy. *Teachers and Teaching* 6(3): 1–6.
- Vacca, R. T., J. L. Vacca, and B. Bruneau. 1997. Teachers reflecting on practice. In *Handbook of research on teaching literacy through the communicative and visual arts*, ed. J. Flood, S. B. Heath, and D. Lapp, 445–50. New York: Macmillan.
- Valli, L., ed. 1992. *Reflective teacher education: Cases and critiques*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Valli, L. 1993. Reconsidering technical and reflective concepts in teacher education. *Action in Teacher Education* 15(2): 35–44.
- White, D. 2002. *Reflective practice: Wishful thinking or a practical leadership tool. The vision and the reality*. International Conference to Study the Issues and Challenges Facing Catholic Educational Leadership, August 4–7, Sydney, Australia. Available at: [www.ceo.parra.catholic.edu.au/pdf/publications/c\\_papers/dan\\_w.pdf](http://www.ceo.parra.catholic.edu.au/pdf/publications/c_papers/dan_w.pdf).
- Zeichner, K., and D. Liston. 1987. Teaching student teachers to reflect. *Harvard Educational Review* 57(1): 23–48.